CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIXTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 7 June 2001, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Camilo Reyes Rodríguez (Colombia)

GE.01-62327 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 876th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have one speaker on my list for today's plenary meeting: the representative of China. I now give the floor to the representative of China, Ambassador Hu Xiaodi.

Mr. HU (China) (translated from Chinese): The Chinese delegation would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I am sure that your extensive experience and outstanding skills will be conducive to promoting the work of the Conference. The Chinese delegation assures you of its full cooperation.

Mr. President, I would like to focus my statement today on the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. China's position on this issue is very clear. We are committed to promoting the negotiation and conclusion by the international community of a legally binding international instrument on the prevention of the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space. In February 2000, the Chinese delegation submitted to the Conference on Disarmament its working paper entitled "China's position on and suggestions for ways to address the issue of prevention of an arms race in outer space at the Conference on Disarmament" (CD/1606), which outlined China's tentative ideas on the above-mentioned international legal instrument. Since then China has conducted further extensive studies on related issues and has come up with some basic elements for the future legal instrument.

Today, on the instructions of the Chinese Government, I am submitting a working paper on possible elements of the future international legal instrument on the prevention of the weaponization of outer space. The Chinese delegation has already suggested that this paper be circulated as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

The paper contains elements of such substantive parts of the instrument as the names of the instrument, the preamble, basic obligations, definitions, national implementation measures, the peaceful uses of outer space, confidence-building measures, verification measures, settlement of disputes, the body implementing the legal instrument, etc. It also includes elements of procedural articles found in most international legal instruments, such as those on amendments, duration and withdrawal, signature and ratification, entry into force and authentic texts.

According to the paper, the future international legal instrument could be entitled "Treaty on the Prevention of the Weaponization of Outer Space" and its basic obligations could include four principle undertakings, namely: not to test, deploy or use in outer space any weapons, weapon systems or their components; not to test, deploy or use on land at sea or in the atmosphere any weapons, weapon systems or their components designed for the conduct of warfare in outer space; not to make direct use of any objects launched into orbit for the purpose of combat operations; not to assist or encourage other countries, regions, international organizations or entities to participate in activities prohibited by this legal instrument. Under these basic obligations all space-based weapons and all weapons attacking outer space targets from the earth are to be banned once and for all.

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In addition, the paper also contains tentative proposals for definitions of such terms as "outer space", "weapons", "weapon systems" and "components of weapon systems". In view of the complexity and sensitivity of the issue of verification, the Chinese working paper offers no specific ideas in this regard. The issue could be substantiated and rounded off during the subsequent negotiations, through the joint efforts of experts from all countries. Since all other relevant elements have been outlined in the paper, I shall not go into any further detail here.

I wish to emphasize that the main ideas contained in the working paper are still highly tentative and require further revision, fleshing out and polishing, which, we hope, will be provided through the further intensive discussions of all delegations. We hope, by following an open-minded approach and through committed and serious negotiations with all delegations, to conclude at an early date an international legal instrument preventing the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space.

Mr. President, it might be asked, what need is there right now to negotiate and conclude an international legal instrument preventing the weaponization and arms race in outer space? Is it not premature to propose the ideas referred to above? If we look seriously at the current situation prevailing in the way that outer space is used and other related developments in outer space, it would not be difficult to draw the conclusion that negotiating such an international legal instrument is not merely a necessity, but an urgent necessity in the field of multilateral arms control and disarmament.

With the advent and development of the information era, a great number of civilian activities of all countries in such areas as communications, navigation, meteorology and certain scientific experiments are increasingly dependent on outer space. Whether or not outer space can be used in a rational manner that safeguards its peace and stability will have an important bearing on world peace and the future of all humankind. It is common knowledge, however, that outer space now faces the danger of weaponization. This danger is manifested in two main aspects, namely, the development of the missile defence system and the planned domination of outer space.

The country concerned has already made it clear that the missile defence system currently under research and development will go beyond the constraints of the ABM Treaty. The missile defence system will undoubtedly incorporate space weapons systems; some of those space weapons systems may be based in outer space, providing target information and guidance for weapons systems located on earth or attacking ground targets from space, thus turning outer space into a battlefield. Other space weapons systems may be based in space or on earth, to intercept and destroy space targets.

The long-term strategical military space development plan known as "Vision 2020", which was put forward in 1998, explicitly states that military space capability will constitute the main force in implementing national security policy and military strategy and the main purpose for which this force will be used in the twenty-first century is to secure space superiority. In this context we have also seen the emergence of the operational theory of ensuring space superiority. Similar alarm is caused by the "space war exercise" conducted in late January 2001. This

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exercise used outer space as a battlefield and its scenario was set to happen in 2017. The exercise envisaged the use of strategic missile defence systems, land-based laser weapons and other means to attack space targets. Not long ago, in the light of the recommendations of a report on the issue, the country in question adjusted the management and organization mechanism of its national security-related space activities. According to that report, there is a danger of a "space Pearl Harbour" and, for that reason, efforts must be made to develop the means of both deterring and defending against hostile acts in and from space and to develop new military capabilities for operations in space.

The above developments clearly demonstrate that the weaponization of outer space is by no means a remote issue; on the contrary, the danger is imminent and the issue one of great urgency. For any preventive measures to have effect the international community must act right now. Otherwise the window of opportunity which we now have will soon close. If, as was the case with nuclear weapons, outer space weapons were first to be developed and deployed and then placed under controls, this would pose untold difficulties. Is it better for us to sit by and watch outer space being weaponized and to defer the negotiation of outer space disarmament or the prevention of the proliferation of outer space weapons to some future date or should we start negotiations to prevent the weaponization of outer space right now? I think the answer to this question is self-evident.

If any country is genuinely worried about a possible threat to its space interests, these concerns could surely be allayed through the negotiation and conclusion of a treaty on the prevention of the weaponization of outer space, as suggested by China. Regardless of the space capabilities of different countries, such a treaty would be able to ensure that their space interests and property were all equally protected. As a result all countries would genuinely be able to channel their limited resources into the peaceful uses of outer space, with consequent benefits for all humankind. A legally binding international treaty of this type would offer the most effective means of safeguarding the interests of all countries. It would be quite a different matter, however, if the real intentions regarding outer space were to flout the obligations of international legal instruments and to seek unilateral and absolute military and strategic superiority based on political, economic and military strength. In the final analysis, the weaponization of outer space will be detrimental to the interests and security of every country, including the very country that has led the way in introducing weapons into outer space. Its consequences will be extremely serious and will serve no one's interests.

Outer space is the common heritage of humankind and I am convinced that it is the shared aspiration of all peoples for outer space to be peaceful and tranquil and that they do not wish to see it turned into a new field of battle and their lives darkened by the shadows of outer space weapons. As the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, the Conference on Disarmament should play its proper role in this regard. In this connection, in 2000 China put forward specific proposals on the mandate for an ad hoc committee on PAROS in its working paper CD/1606. In its recent document CD/1644, which China fully supports, the delegation of the Russian Federation also unequivocally came out in favour of the establishment of an ad hoc

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committee on PAROS with a negotiating mandate. We appeal once again to all countries to negotiate and conclude an international legal instrument on the prevention of the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space, based on strict compliance with existing multilateral and bilateral treaties and agreements applicable to outer space.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of China for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage?

If not, I would like merely to say that, as you all know, through the various coordinators and following intensive informal consultation, your President has made a proposal that, if agreed to, would enable us to appoint coordinators to deal with three specific issues of a procedural nature. In the presidential consultations held yesterday, I received initial reactions from the coordinators to this proposal. This reaction was positive and it is also clear that a little more time is needed for us to try to take a specific decision on this matter. It is my intention, therefore, to explore this possibility next week and I sincerely hope that it will then be possible to take a decision at the plenary meeting to be held next Thursday, provided, of course, that this is in line with the wishes of all delegations participating in the Conference.

That concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 14 June 2001, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.